

An Inner History of “Turkish Music Revolution” – Demise of a Music Magazine

ORHAN TEKELİOĞLU

The founding years of the Turkish Republic were marked by a series of fundamental innovations within the sphere of culture. Referred to as “revolutions” (*devrimler*) by the state elite, these changes were designed to bring about the rapid transformation of existing society along the lines of an incipient but yet imprecise notion of “national identity”. What was most characteristic of this attempt at transformation was its “state-directedness”, originating from within the state apparatus and not from within the society itself. Moreover, it was iconoclastic in force since what was being attempted was the destruction of old symbols and their replacement with others carrying new meaning. One of the most striking of these cultural reforms was the replacement of the Arabic alphabet with the Latin one in the writing of the Turkish language. As a result, within a very brief period of time (no more than six months), the literate people of the new republic became illiterate. Other reforms had a deep impact on the everyday life of the masses. They included changes in attire (including the adoption of the hat), which were designed to remove public distinctions of class, profession, and religious status among the people, the adoption of a new calendar, and a new system of weights and measures, the latter two designed to conform to international standards. The reforms that perhaps had the greatest direct impact on the people were those having to do with religious law and practices: in 1926, the formal Islamic code of law was replaced by a laic Western civil code; a parallel measure against folk Islam had already been taken with the abolition in 1925 of the *tekkes* and *zaviyes* (lodges) of the dervish orders, which had had quite an influence over the masses.

The culmination of all of these reforms was in 1929 with the introduction of National Schools, the intent of which was to inculcate the new nationalistic and pro-Western socio-cultural identity. The curriculum of the new schools was designed to reinforce reforms that had already been introduced by employing the new script, emphasizing principles of secularism, and expanding upon the cultural values introduced in those reforms. It was believed that the political values of the new-born nation had to be disseminated to the fledgling generation. With this in mind, the principles underlying the newly developing national system of education, which included adult education as well, would encompass those emphasizing modernization, as professed by Mustafa Kemal and his cadre. The reforms were quick to have an impact, with the literacy rate rising from about 8 per cent in 1928 to over 20 per cent in 1935. In addition to the formal education provided to school children by the National Schools, the People’s Houses (*Halkevleri*) provided free education to adults - not only in the area of reading and writing, for the illiterate, but also practically-oriented programs for people having different interests and avocations.

Towards Reforms in Turkish Music

This article will focus on the politico-cultural developments (e.g., certain musical events, structural reforms, ideas) originating in the early years of the republic and continuing up to the 1940s, that paved the way for reforms in the sphere of music. The first indications of the musical reforms that were to ensue can be detected in the notion of “imposed synthesis” expounded by the leading ideologist of his day, Ziya Gökalp.¹

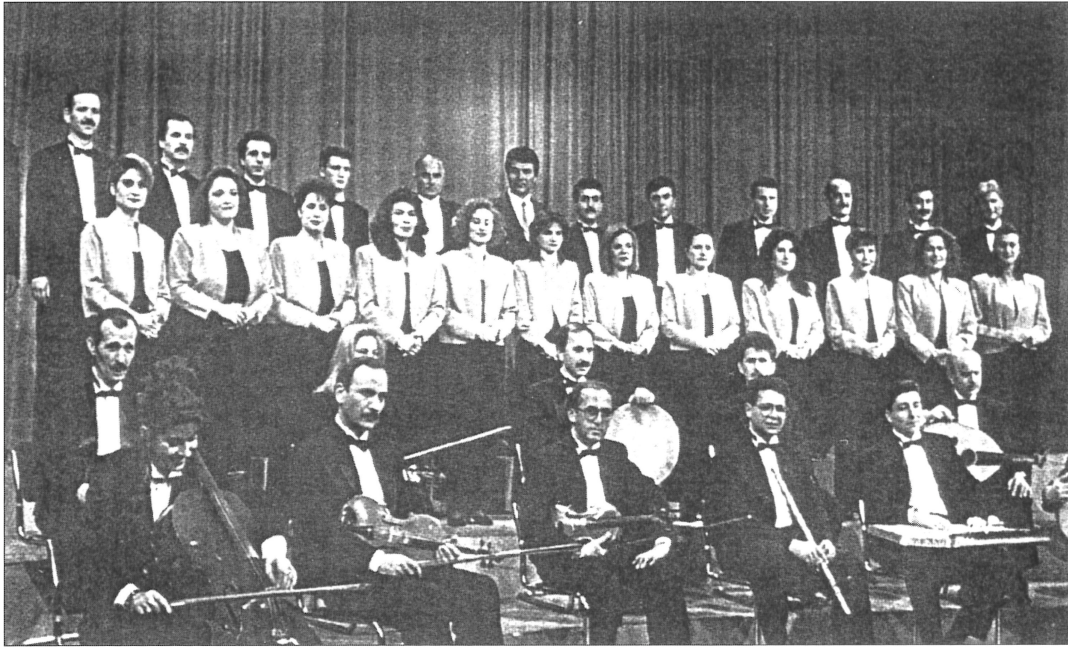
Gökalp’s well-known book, “Principles of Turkism” (1923), provided the ideological foundations for the Republican-imposed synthesis, and to a certain extent, constituted itself as a manual, laying out how, in his words, the fusion of its origins with those of the West was to be executed. Gökalp considered the eventual success of the new nation-state and Turkish nationalism to be inextricably linked to the development of “Turkish Civilization”, which, he argued, must advance at all costs. With regard to the issue of music, he spoke of how Turkish music could become national and actually outlined a program for its future development. Gökalp maintained that the music of the elites during the pre-Republican era, while representing the pinnacle of what Ottoman culture had achieved in terms of music, was essentially Byzantine, which he called, “Eastern”. To reinforce his point, he referred to ancient Greek music, which, because it is based on quarter tones and tended to repeat “the same melody over and over”, he found “artificial” and “depressingly monotonous”. In contrast, argued Gökalp, the musical reforms that occurred during the Middle Ages in Europe had gone far to overcome the mistakes of Greek music, with opera going even further, giving rise to the “civilized” Western music known today. On the other hand, the Eastern music that emerged from ancient Greek models, and that had been played for centuries in the Ottoman lands, continued in its “ill” state. The only “healthy” music in Anatolia was Folk music, which was enjoyed by the Turkish masses. Thus, Gökalp divided music into three classes: Eastern music, Western music, and Folk music. Only if “our national culture” welds with “our new civilization [the West]”, emphasized Gökalp, can one speak of a “national music”. In other words, the problem and its solution were defined as follows: Ottoman (i.e., Eastern) music was to be disregarded; Folk music was to be the primary source of the new music; and the musical reformation was to be based upon Western music and its harmonic scale - the overall goal being the creation of a new national music.

The reform-oriented attempts to reach this goal, on the other hand, reflect an astonishing lack of sophistication, possibly influenced by a naive positivism: Folk tunes were to be collected, categorized, re-worked according to methods of Western music, and finally made polyphonic. As pointed out by many scholars in the field, the model for the synthesis considered by both Gökalp and Mustafa Kemal was inspired by experiences in Russia, where a group of composers known as “The Russian Five” had followed such a path to achieve a “national synthesis” in music in the nineteenth century.²

The new policies directed toward establishing a new form of music based on a West-East synthesis began to bear fruit in 1924, one year after the establishment of the Turkish Republic. The Palace Symphony Orchestra (*Saray Senfoni Orkestrası*), the only institution of music where polyphonic music had been performed in the

1 For the notions of ‘spontaneous synthesis’ and ‘imposed synthesis’, see Orhan Tekelioğlu “The Rise of a Spontaneous Synthesis: The Historical Background of Turkish Popular Music”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32/2, (April 1996), 194-216.

2 M. Belge, et al, *Atatürk Devrimleri İdeolojisinin Türk Müzik Kültürüne Doğrudan ve Dolaylı Etkileri* (Direct and Indirect Impact of the Ideology of Atatürk’s Reforms on the Turkish Musical Culture), (Istanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Türk Müziği Klübü Yayınları, 1980), pp.34 and p.48.



Turkish Art Music Choir and Orchestra.

Ottoman era, was abolished in April. The new orchestra set up in its place was named the Presidential Orchestra (*Riyaset-i Cümhur Orkestrası*). Moreover, the training institute of the former orchestra, the Palace Military Band (*Saray Mızıkası*) [which was another vestige from the Ottoman period, comprised of musicians educated in the Palace Military Band School (*Saray Mızıka Mektebi*)], was closed down and reopened in September of the same year under the name “School for Music Teachers” (*Musiki Muallimleri Mektebi*). These changes were not simply cosmetic, but were in fact the early yet pervasive signs of the sensitivity of the political elite to the state of music existing at that time. There were other indications of this sensitivity. In 1926, the Oriental Music Section (*Şark Musikisi Şubesi*) of the *Dârü'l-Elhan*, an institution remaining from the late Ottoman days and the only public educational institution having functions similar to those of Western conservatories, was closed down.³ The impact of this decision was reinforced by a ban imposed on monophonic music education (e.g., Turkish music having its roots in the Ottoman period) in both public and private schools in 1927.

The enactment of the law abolishing the *tekkes* and *zaviyes* in 1926 dealt a serious blow to one of the most important cultural components of the *tekkes*: the music used during the performance of religious rituals there. This essentially politically motivated decision paved the way for a cultural vacuum to form within the practice of what was referred to as “*tekke music*”. More importantly, it deprived many talented *tekke* musicians of their livelihood. Especially after the 1930s, in Istanbul and other major urban centers of the young republic, some of the talented musicians from the religious tradition began to secularize their music and popularize (e.g., commercialize) their work to earn a living. In fact, they came to create a new genre, a new taste in popular music, which, in practice came to serve as a major obstacle to the Republican elite’s efforts to create a West-East synthesis.⁴

Meanwhile, in the challenge of the institutions and values of the former Ottoman regime and those of its possible supporters, intense public debate ensued over the inseparable components of the politico-cultural West-East synthesis being forged:

3 G. Oransay, *Atatürk ile Küğ* (Atatürk and Music), (Izmir: Küğ Yayını, 1985), p.112.

4 For the conceptual difference between the ‘West-East’ and ‘East-West’ syntheses, see Orhan Tekelioğlu “The Rise of a Spontaneous Synthesis: The Historical Background of Turkish Popular Music”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32/2, (April 1996), 194-216.



The Presidential Symphony Orchestra.

the notions of West and East. Throughout 1927 there appeared in newspapers fiery debates waged by the prominent pro-government columnists of the day who fiercely attacked the “Eastern”, e.g., the “obsolete” character of the Ottoman political system.

It was in 1928 that Mustafa Kemal made his first public assessment of Turkish music. After listening to a concert where two groups - one performing Turkish music and the other “Western”- in succession, he asserted: “This music, this unsophisticated music, cannot possibly fulfill the needs of the innovative Turkish soul, the Turkish sensibility, in its yearning to explore new paths. We have just heard music of the civilized world, upon which the audience, who, in contrast to its rather anemic reaction to the whimpering known as Eastern music, immediately came to life ... Turks are, indeed, naturally vivacious and high-spirited; if these admirable traits were for a time not perceived, it was not their fault.”⁵ Mustafa Kemal here blamed the Ottoman intellectuals for their lack of awareness of the Turkish “character” and accused them of coercing Turks into listening to a soporific music that ran contrary to their spirit.

Throughout the period 1924-1929 there was an orchestrated ideological attempt to create a political system based on pro-Western principles. This was particularly so with respect to the so-called “music revolution”, which was personally inaugurated by Mustafa Kemal. His assessment quoted above became its *Leitmotif*. From the beginning of the late 1930s, the State initiated a number of coordinated cultural policies in the field of music:

- Formal education in Western polyphonic music began in the conservatories, which were modeled on Western schools of music. Foreign instructors were hired while some gifted students were sent abroad for training.
- Symphony orchestras began giving free concerts in various parts of the country. Both serious and popular works of Western polyphonic music were regularly broadcast on the radio.
- Courses in music were offered to the public free of charge in the People’s Houses, where both polyphonic music and standardized monophonic folk tunes were played.

5 G. Oransay, *Atatürk ile Küğ* (Atatürk and Music), (Izmir: Küğ Yayını, 1985), p. 24.



A sample of *Nota* (May 1933).

– At “State Balls” (music and dance nights organized by the public servants of the urban centers), examples of Western dance music were selected from such forms as waltzes and tangos.

– In the schools, although there was little in the way of teaching the actual playing of instruments, a fairly extensive coverage of Western musical history and its composers was included in the curriculum.

The Turkish audience, however, on a large scale, showed little interest either in the polyphonic music being composed by Turks or in the Western classical music that was being played. Instead, as a number of scholars have indicated,⁶ the people of the big

6 M. Stokes, *The Arabesk Debate. Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 93, and also see, N. Güngör, *Arabesk: Sosyokültürel Açıdan Arabesk Müzik* (Arabesque: A Sociocultural View at Arabesque Music), (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınları, 1990), p. 55.

cities began to enjoy the popular songs composed and played by the former *tekke* musicians or tuned into Arab radio stations broadcasting Arab music. This happened because of a lack of consideration on the part of the “cultural elite” toward any harmonic form of music that a broad segment of society could enjoy and identify with.

A Music Magazine Straddling Cultural Policies

This chapter aims at defining the role of a unique though short-lived magazine, *Nota*, in the 1930s - a period characterized by attempts at Westernization and consolidation of the young republic. The first issue of *Nota* was published on 5 April, 1930. According to its first editorial, it was a magazine specializing in the publication of the scores of the popular tunes of the day. The editor of the magazine, Mildan Niyazi Ayomak (1887-1947), was a music teacher and a composer of pieces in the Ottoman Classical Music genre. Mildan Niyazi had been a political activist during the Ottoman period and had, therefore, been sent into exile in Egypt, then under Ottoman control, where he was exposed to Arab and Middle Eastern flavor in music. After his many years of exile, he moved back to Izmir, the second largest urban center in the Ottoman Empire, and founded a school of music - the *İzmir Musiki Mektebi* (Music School of Izmir) in 1920. Because of the aforementioned ban placed on Turkish music education in 1927, his school had lost its *raison d'être* and had to completely revise its curriculum and desist from teaching music. The school was reopened with a few students under the name School of Life Knowledge (*Hayat Bilgisi Mektebi*), and continued, with less success, its program in adult education up until 1932. After the closing of the school, Mildan Niyazi moved to Istanbul, where he founded an association called the *İstanbul Musiki Birliği* (Music Association of Istanbul). It was intended for professional musicians coming from the Ottoman genre of music. One of the association's projects was the publication of *Nota*. A short time after *Nota* was closed down, the association also dissolved (in 1935).

The lifespan of the magazine was a short one, ending in 1934 after the publication of its 37th issue. While it is undoubtedly possible to attribute this to poor sales figures or the personal consideration of the editor, if one examines closely the editorials, content, discussions, and score-publishing policies of the magazine, other clues emerge that do a better job at accounting for its closure. I would argue that the closing of *Nota* has less to do with economic or personal considerations than with political ones.

Nota's Idea of Synthesis

The first issue of the magazine established its position in the daily debates on musical reforms. It is clear from the motto of the magazine that *Nota* had its own notion of what synthesis meant: “While defending our personality, we should *gradually* (emphasis added) move toward the New Music.” This idea of gradual development in new music was, in fact, a response to the revolutionary idea of abrupt change, which was espoused by the cultural elite in their efforts to shape a new kind of music. In the first editorial, entitled “Why We Publish”, Mildan Niyazi defines the situation of music in Turkey in rather realistic terms and portrayed the economic and social conditions of musicians and composers of the Ottoman classical music tradition, most of which, as explained earlier, were from the *tekke* tradition:

What has become the fundamental aim of contemporary music is not expertise but rather profit. Due to the shortage of trained musicians, worthless tunes are becoming

popular and are being sold throughout the country, thereby debasing the level of music appreciation to very low levels... We should thoroughly determine the route through which our music can be revived ... It must be perceived as a whole... The Alaturka [Ottoman Classical Music] cannot be transformed into Alafranga [Western music]. This is because their essentials and sounds are totally different. We cannot simply adopt Western music as it is. If we do so, then we would not be able to call it “our” music. We should preserve and accept the music that we have in our hand, as it is formed, within its own universe, and with its own instruments (*nay* and *tanbur*). To touch our own music is comparable to murder. In order to create our own international music, we should work on our own melodies, our tunes, and the way in which they are put together, and then polyphonize them [according to the rules of Western harmonic music]; this is indeed the greatest ideal of our magazine.⁷

The latter part of the quote is particularly significant. It is here that Ziya Gökalp’s notion of synthesis, which takes the Anatolian folk tunes into account as the main source of that synthesis, is directly challenged. The notion of “our music” is now replaced with “Alaturka”, another name for Ottoman music, and “touching” it is claimed to be comparable to “murder”. After using such harsh expressions, the editorial offers a reconciliation with Western polyphony in the new Turkish music. It is suggested that the new Turkish music should be based upon the tunes of urban Ottoman music rather than on those of a fictive folk music of the countryside. Here, the term “fictive” is deliberately chosen, simply because of the fact that folk music virtually did not exist in the Ottoman urban centers. The literate musicians and composers of the day had learned, practiced, and performed music in an urban setting. This is possibly why the magazine praises Eastern music - which is considered by Gökalp as a sign of backwardness - as “our music” and has a positive view about it.

In any case, the editorial is bitter in tone and is representative of the general attitude the magazine takes toward the state of affairs confronting musicians of the Ottoman music genre. It is easy to comprehend the enormous difficulties facing them. In a similar vein, the following excerpt from the news article entitled, “We Have Also Lost Kaptanzade”, about the death of a famous composer within the genre of Ottoman music, is also instructive:

In the 20 February issue of Cumhuriyet [the influential and pro-government daily newspaper of the time], on one of the back pages, it was reported under the heading “Karagöz Lovers’ Society”, that the chairman of the society, the composer Kaptanzade Ali Rıza Bey, had passed away while on a visit to Balıkesir [a small city close to Istanbul] to perform in concerts. The report also listed the possible candidates for the post of chairman. That is to say, we would not have known about this sad event if the society had not existed or if the deceased had not been its chairman. We should never forget that we once learned from a short and awkward sentence written in one of the newspapers, about the death of Tanburi Tahsin Bey [a well-known player of the *tanbur*] as the death of the head of a cavalry regiment and painter.

Poor musicians of this country! They work, they wear themselves out because of the atrocities and miseries of this life and eventually, without disturbing anyone else’s life, without hurting anyone, say farewell. Ironically, the only “reward” they receive, whether dead or alive, is a bare expression of grief from an insensitive milieu.⁸

⁷ *Nota*, 1, (5 April 1933), 2.

⁸ *Nota*, 22, (1 March 1934), 101.

This quote, particularly the latter part, is particularly emotive in language, portraying as it does the cessation of respect for the classical musician in the new “insensitive milieu”. Beyond the emotional aspect of this assessment, it becomes apparent that the musical reforms and related efforts in this direction in the 1930s were inevitably changing the public image of the musicians coming from the Ottoman tradition. It must have been these efforts, as well as the cultural situation (“the new insensitive milieu”) that made the magazine one of the targets of the pro-Western cultural elite of the day. In time, the fighting spirit of the early editorials faded away and was, especially after the 11th issue, gradually replaced with a new, notably more defensive tone. This shift in editorial tone can in part be interpreted as a response to the attention this magazine had begun to receive from the cultural elite, as well as the pressure it experienced due to its publication policy.

A defensive editorial about the reforms designed to establish a new musical genre, written personally by Mildan Niyazi in 1933, is interesting in this respect:

[W]e cannot imagine anyone who could reject a need for clearance, reform and revolution in our music ... We think that only with these measures [reforms], can our music take off its *şalvar* [baggy trousers of the people in the countryside in the Ottoman age] and *fes* [a popular form of hat from the Ottoman era], and put on its [Western] trousers and hat.⁹

The defensive tone is quite clear here: Mildan Niyazi understood that he had no power to halt the pro-Western reforms being made in music, and thus no longer dared to speak of “touching” Ottoman music as being comparable to “murder”. He was, in a way, compelled to accept half-heartedly the need for “revolution” and followed the daily jargon about the backwardness of the Ottoman age, symbolized by the *şalvar* and *fes*, and the “forwardness” of the Western culture, symbolized by the hat and trousers.

Nevertheless, the problems and criticisms of the magazine seemed to continue, with new editorials adopting an even more defensive tone. The editorial of the 25th issue nearly acknowledged the “discontent” of the pro-Western cultural elite with the publication policy of *Nota*. At the same time, however, it attempted to reach a reconciliation through the use of defensive maneuvering:

We know very well that our magazine has been unable to satisfy readers who identify with Western music. Yet, the essence of our interest in both types of music to an equal degree is a natural outcome of our music profession. As we wrote in the editorial of our first issue, “Why Do We Publish?”, we are happy to even dream of polyphonic Turkish music reaching the international arena. In our opinion, this imagined music can only be possible when talented minds know Eastern and Western music equally well. Because of this belief, we publish examples of both genres in equal size. With the same belief, we try hard to elaborate simple and discrete rules for Turkish music, especially for people involved in Western music so that they can quickly understand the rules and theories of Turkish music which otherwise would be impossible for them to comprehend in years, let alone months.¹⁰

This quote is definitely defensive in character and intends to redefine the main policies of the magazine. The problematic stance of *Nota* among “the readers involved in Western music” is honestly spelled out. It may be presumed from this

⁹ *Nota*, 11, (15 September 1933), p. 42.

¹⁰ *Nota*, 25, (15 April 1934), 113.

attitude that the level of criticism leveled against the magazine in the on-going music “revolution” had significantly increased, and that the editor had to justify his position. This explains the defensive words used in describing what *Nota* is for. Moreover, despite the reference to the editorial of the first issue, matters are presented somewhat deceptively. Looking back at the content of the first editorial, one can hardly get the impression that the followers of *Nota* would “feel happy even dreaming of polyphonic Turkish music reaching the international arena”. On the contrary, it was boldly put forth that the music “in our hands” should be preserved as it was created, with its sounds and instruments. In the defensive editorial quoted above, it was also claimed that the magazine published examples of Eastern and Western music to an equal degree, which could not be further from the truth if one actually examines the content of the magazine. The last part of the quote, however, is a sympathetic message to the avid reader who enjoys the Ottoman genre. Here it is claimed that Turkish music (meaning, Ottoman classical music) cannot easily be comprehended in a short period of time. This is a rather indirect attack on the Western music-oriented Turkish musicians, blaming them for being slow in understanding the rules of Turkish music.

Content of the Magazine

The examination of the general content of the magazine reveals certain points of difference vis-à-vis the West-East synthesis of the pro-Western cultural elite. While *Nota* is also in favor of an West-East synthesis, it is not through serious music composed in a Western polyphonic form for the elite listener, but rather through popular monophonic tunes, mostly in song format, for the ordinary listener. One may wonder how these new monophonic compositions, many of which were published in *Nota*, differed from examples of Ottoman popular songs. The answer can be found in both the lyrics and the understanding of music composition.

The lyrics were now mostly secular, narrating a new lifestyle for a less religious listener living in an urban setting. Even though pioneer forms of such an attitude could also be sensed in some of the lyrics of late Ottoman classical music, almost all the new tunes have this orientation. Republican and secular Turkey’s new urban lifestyle inevitably found its way into the whole musical scene. In some tunes, male and female choirs sang refrains comprised of flirtatious complaints about the opposite sex. Another interesting example of this mundane attitude can be found in the song entitled *Prozît Şarkısı* [Song for Cheers], which was specifically composed for drinking houses, and inspired by the German way of expressing good wishes when drinking with someone.

Traditional Turkish music is based on certain fixed modal structures (*makam*), which are written at the beginning of the score of any tune. In the new compositions that were written during the period of reform, strange and previously unheard of hybrid model structures began to appear - perhaps in the spirit of the “East-West synthesis” being forged. One of the most striking examples of these was a new *makam* called *Nihavent-Tango*, based upon the traditional structure of the *Nihavent* modality, but rhythmically fused with the Western form of Tango. Within a similar vein, another new modal structure, the *Oryantal-Fokstrot* (Oriental Foxtrot), was invented. This case was unique, however, in that traditional music lacked an “oryantal” *makam*. Strangely enough, the orientalist mind set of the Kemalist cultural elite assumed that it was a synthesis of an Eastern element¹¹ with a Western one (the fox-

¹¹ It is interesting to note that, contrary to Ziya Gökalp’s ideas, the Eastern element, namely, makam-based music of Ottoman tradition, is conceived here in a purely positive way in a possible synthesis.

trot), thus interpreting it as the kind of synthesis that they were after. Another derivative structure worth mentioning within the context of the attempts of the Kemalist regime at nationalizing Turkish music is the *Sultan-ı Yegâh*, which is, in fact, based on the traditional *yegâh makam*. Originally imperial in manner (thus the reason behind its name “Sultan’s Yegâh”), upon being nationalized, it was retitled, *Milli Yegâh*, which means, “Nation’s Yegâh”.

In addition to the new scores of popular tunes, biographies of popular contemporary composers and singers were also presented in the magazine. What is striking about all these life stories is that most of the new popular musicians had *tekke* origins. They themselves either came directly from the *tekkes* or had been trained by teachers coming from the *tekke* tradition. For instance, one of the rising stars of the day, Münir Nurettin Selçuk (1900-1981), now considered the last great singer/performer of the Ottoman classical music genre in the Republican era, was praised. This was so even though, as it was noted, while he himself was not a direct descendent of the *tekke* tradition, his masters were ex-members of prominent *tekkes*.

Among these biographies, the most praised composer/performer was Sadettin Kaynak (1895-1961), who had been brought up in the *tekke* tradition and was a cantor (*hafız*) of the Koran.¹² An established star of the period, Kaynak not only collaborated with Münir Nurettin but also, in later years, was responsible for the adaptation of songs from Arab films. Through his understanding of composition, he was able to produce not simply a “synthesis” but rather a “modernization” of classical music. By creating an urban flavor to the music, a fundamental change in the musical taste of the Turkish listener was brought about. The comment on Kaynak in *Nota* was unusually engaging and gave an early and realistic evaluation of what would become the standard in Turkish popular music and “taste” in the years to come:

Certainly, and with great success, he [Hafız Sadettin] himself has invented a “way” of music that portrays in song our Turkish identity having roots, perhaps, in pre-Ottoman times. This “way” includes the flavors found in our folk music, yet at the same time is definitely different from it ... These compositions offer different things to different people, depending on the particular blend of musical taste present in society at a particular time. It is our fervent desire that compositions of this type become the basis for our musical harmonics.¹³

Here again an indirect attack is launched against the cultural elite and the “folk music” notion of Ziya Gökalp. This is done within the framework of an examination of the Ottoman music - inspired compositions of Kaynak. Not only are they connected to the genuine existence of the Turk, but his composition style supports *Nota*’s idea of a popular synthesis being an alternative to an elitist one.

A Questionnaire on the Future of Turkish Music

In the first issue of its second year, *Nota* published an open letter in which the ongoing intense debate over the clash between Western and Eastern music was redescribed and a public appeal made to the musicians of both genres to present their views about the future of a possible East-West synthesis in Turkish music. In order to structure the responses expected, a very detailed questionnaire was prepared.¹⁴

¹² Because of his background, he was often called simply ‘Hafız’ in the musical milieu.

¹³ *Nota*, 19, (15 January 1934), 92.

¹⁴ *Nota*, 25, (15 April 1934), 120.

The responses, which began to be published in subsequent issues, revealed an interesting twist: there was a nearly unanimous response in support of pro-Western, polyphonic music (e.g., in support of official cultural policies). Strangely enough, no replies were made by either pro-monophonic readers or directly by the editor to these letters, even though they had been written in a rather insulting tone. This strange “silence” can only be explained as a form of self-censuring mechanism exercised on the part of the majority of *Nota* readers. At the same time, the extent of the pro-Western responses demonstrate the degree to which *Nota* had keen and critical readers from among the pro-Western cultural elite.

The following response to the questionnaire can be considered typical and can serve as a basis for understanding how the “official” view on the topic was formulated. The letter is signed by a certain İlyas Bey, who was the chief representative of the Fine Arts Branch of the People’s House of Trabzon. It is known that, in the founding years of the Republic, People’s Houses were the main sites for disseminating the cultural policies of the State to the public. İlyas Bey, convinced by the “revolutionary” spirit, openly attacks the existing monophonic music as weak and not suitable for the masses:

The monophonic music that has been practiced so far, including its [popular] contemporary song forms being composed, is undoubtedly very feeble compared to the music being composed for the masses. The Turkey of 1934 and its new and intellectual generations cannot be satisfied with this “tekke-sounding” music; they [the masses] demand a more expressive, lively, and energetic form of music. In order to realize this, our classical music should be reworked with the classical techniques of Western music so as to achieve a richness of expression and description that will eventually develop into concert and stage music. In addition to that, the basis of an energetic culture of music, equal to that of Western jazz music, should be constructed.¹⁵

The idea of how true music must be composed is clearly formulated here: First and foremost, music is for the masses, and thus must be “expressive, lively, and energetic”. One may sense here traces of the mass-oriented conceptions of German and Italian cultural policies in Europe in the 1930s. Since music is for the masses, it should also have the emphasis and quality of concert or stage music. İlyas Bey continues his assessment of the structure of Turkish music, and makes a very peculiar suggestion:

Modal structures [*makams*] that are not so different from one another and make our music vague and difficult to comprehend, should also be reworked and reduced to a single essential form. Either one of the modal structures such as *Uşak*, *Hüseyni*, *Muhayyer*, *Karçiğer*, which are in essence not so different from one another, should be chosen or a new modal structure covering all the components of the cited modalities should be created. In regard to this, the new modalities should be based on and classified according to the Western major and minor scales and their specifications.

Therefore, according to him, all the structural developments that had taken place in Ottoman classical music should be changed immediately and be made to resemble those based on the minor and major scales of Western music. Whether such a drastic reform was actually necessary for Turkish music was not even a point of contention since he felt that the only developed and “true” music was undoubtedly Western music, with its major and minor scales.

¹⁵ *Nota*, 28, (1 June 1934), 134.

Two issues later, there came the elitist critique of Ercüment Behzat Lav (1903-1983), a well-known poet, theater-person, and cultural figure, who was at the same time working as a senior announcer on the radio. This critique is significant not only because Lav was a well-known public figure, but also because he held a senior post in the state-owned radio, which was to place a ban on Turkish music in November of the same year. It is also important to note that Ercüment Behzat would become the director of radio programs in 1935, just months after his assessment of the situation of Turkish music published in *Nota*. His promotion is not coincidental, if one reads closely this assessment in which Ercüment Behzat refers directly to Russian nationalism in music:

Up until Tchaikovsky, Russian music had been an ordinary blueprint of Central European music. [Only after] Russian composers worked on the folk songs of the masses did they reach today's maturity. If Brahms had not worked on national motifs, the music of Hungary would not have appeared in the repertoire of the world orchestras ... The nucleus of tomorrow's Turkish music lies to a great extent in the Anatolian tunes ... What our millions of people require is neither mystical *tekke* music, nor *mey* [wine], nor *muğbeçe* [server in a drinking house], nor *bade* [wine-glass], nor *yar* [beloved] ... Without delay, we must give our people, now living like a spent wave, sonic food on a universal scale. The damage already done to people's minds by drinking-house songs and musically worthless jazz tunes is comparable to the use of morphine and cocaine. We should not forget that in some countries where the musical culture is not as weak as our own, jazz is forbidden in order to protect the musical taste of the people. Today, if a person were to try to organize his life along the line of Omar Hayyam or Mevlana, he would very likely be considered mad and perhaps even be locked up. Similarly, it is a social necessity in this modernizing Turkey of today to confine to the dustbin of history the opium-like music of unlearned men, which is played on the *ud* [oriental lute] and *tef* [tambourine]. As the first step in this sorting and cleansing operation for the ear, the publication and printing of records of songs should be strictly limited and controlled.¹⁶

This quote is very significant in that it supports the argument of this article concerning the possibility of *coercion* as a reason for the closing of *Nota*. Not only is the original formula of Ziya Gökalp repeated, but that Anatolian tunes are the source for the West-East synthesis in music is also mentioned. In addition, Lav blatantly rejects that there is any other possibility for synthesis to occur, for example, in popular music, since for him, this would be no different from "drinking-house songs" or "worthless" entertainment music, that he groups under the category, "jazz". The last sentence of the quote is particularly enlightening. It is here that Lav speaks of a "cleansing" operation and suggests a total prohibition of the printing of the scores and the publication of the records of such music. If this desire is coupled with the upcoming ban on Turkish music in November 1934, it is not difficult to imagine that his next post on the radio would be as the director of radio programs.

The ban placed on Turkish music in 1934 has an exciting history of its own. Mustafa Kemal, in his opening speech at the 1934 session of parliament, made his second public assessment of Turkish music. Stressing that advancement in the fine arts must be encouraged without delay, he asked for rapid progress to be made in music, and continued as follows:

¹⁶ *Nota*, 30, (1 July 1934), 143.

A measure of the change undergone by a nation is its capacity to absorb and grasp a change in music. The music that they are trying to get people to listen to today is not our music, so it can hardly fill the bill. We must not lose sight of this fact. What is required is the collection of national expression that conveys fine thoughts and feelings, and without delay, putting it to music, along the lines of the most modern of rules. Only in this way can Turkish music rise to take its place among the music of the world.¹⁷

One of the immediate outcomes of this speech was the broadcasting *ban* placed on Turkish music, justified as having been inspired by the speech of Mustafa Kemal.¹⁸ This ban was announced on November 3, 1934 and lasted for twenty months. Even though this ban was later lifted, it was replaced by a much more comprehensive system of control, which was indeed a very systematic form of censorship that described the type of Turkish music that could be played on the radio and, later, on T.V. Given the fact that Lav held a senior post at the radio, the desire he expressed in his response to the questionnaire for a total prohibition of the publication of Turkish music can be traced in the later broadcasting policies of the radio. The monopoly Turkish Radio and Television held on broadcasting was not abolished until the early 1990s.

The only positive, yet oblique, answer to the questionnaire from the pro-Ottoman side came from a well-known violinist, Kemani İzzet, who used a very cautious and defensive tone. In his response, he preferred to discuss the real meaning of what is called *alaturka*, which, according to İzzet, is mostly and imprecisely mixed with what is “Eastern”. For İzzet, the *alaturka* genre, by its very nature, is a very versatile format, and is thus suitable for Western harmony:

Alaturka music is entirely suitable for the adoption and adaptation of motifs. If we are able to educate scholarly composers of good taste, they may help our music achieve a position praised by international music authorities. Even though the Western system of harmonics is based on major and minor scales, it is not limited to those scales. There does indeed exist full liberty. Every kind of plain music has a potential to develop into something more advanced. Therefore, the motifs found in *alaturka* music can easily be blended with the Western system of music.¹⁹

Thus in İzzet’s eyes, *alaturka* music is full of motifs that could be combined with both the plain and advanced structure of Western music. It is interesting to note that among the many responses made to the questionnaire in *Nota*, this was the only one evaluating Turkish music in a somewhat positive way. İzzet’s response was the last one to appear in *Nota*, which suspended the publication of any other responses in forthcoming issues. After its 37th issue, without prior farewell to its readers, this unique magazine was abruptly closed down.

Conclusion

The story of this unique magazine in many ways reflects the dynamics of the cultural reforms being carried out during the early years of the founding of the Turkish

17 G. Oransay, *Atatürk ile Küğ* (Atatürk and Music), (Izmir: Küğ Yayını, 1985), p. 26.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

19 *Nota*, 32 (1 August 1934), 149.

Republic and thus provides insight as to the nature of those reforms. One of the most noteworthy of these insights is that the Republican project of Westernization was executed from above, in a rather authoritarian way, without giving consideration to any social resistance. What *Nota* represented to the cultural elite was a critical attitude directed toward the already established policies of the young state, which did not tolerate such attitudes. Another of these insights is that the ideological framework within which the new cultural policies were formulated and implemented by the cultural elite was positivistic. The intellectuals as well as the rulers of the new republic wholeheartedly believed in the existence of universal truths. As a result, they came up with an unmediated, naively positivistic solution: folk tunes were to be harmonized, using the methods of Western music, and made polyphonic.

Another consequence of this particular history of music was the disregard demonstrated by the cultural elite toward positive offers coming from *alaturka* musicians. While in the political arena, even though, at least at the level of discourse, the ruling elite totally rejected the previous Ottoman political institution, they still had to make some strange coalitions with vestiges of the Ottoman political elite. In contrast, on the musical scene, the cultural elite of the young republic not only completely rejected the musical heritage of the Ottoman period, they denied the possibility of the modernization of Ottoman music, which had, in fact, been the *de facto* “taste” of the urban listener. Instead, what they had proffered was Gökalp’s notion the East-West synthesis based upon a fictive folk music, which had neither existed in urban centers nor been known thoroughly by the prominent musicians of the day. Without any intellectualization, *Nota* had come up with its own idea of synthesis - perhaps a kind of “spontaneous synthesis” - which was not a rejection but rather an alternative approach to the republican idea of synthesis. Nevertheless, this brave attempt was not only disregarded by the cultural elite but, as the story shows, was suppressed, resulting in the eventual closing down of the magazine.

The main reason that the republican cultural elite rejected the novel idea of synthesis put forth by *Nota* is more than likely related to a *lack* of interest in popular music among the cultural elite during the early years of the republic. This is particularly discernible if one considers the “from above” character of the Turkish process of political socialization that tended to cultivate political elite who were insensitive to cultural elements coming “from below”. In other words, this tendency towards insensitivity is very widespread in all public discussions of cultural policies. Particularly striking in relation to the notion of an East-West synthesis in music is the absence of debate on the possibility of a synthesis in popular music. Quite to the contrary, the young republic and its limited cadre were more interested in solutions for the masses for the sake of the masses - a political reflex remaining from the state-oriented process of political socialization of the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, no thought was given to the notion that any form of popular music could be something that most of the people could enjoy or identify with.

In conclusion, it may be argued that the “from above” strategy of the 1930s had inevitably produced its “from below” counter-movements in the years to come. As observed in the editorials and the publication policies of *Nota*, musicians as well as listeners resisted through their own means and, while they lost the battle in the 1930s, they eventually developed their own synthesis in the 1950s, as well thereafter. In sum, there were, on the one hand, the cultural policies of the young republic that had been imposed by the political powers, and, on the other, a handful of skilled musicians and their listeners from a traditional background that resisted the policies imposed from above. It is within these politico-cultural dynamics that the modern popular music of Turkey has developed.